In Search Of Panty Cult

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It started as a goof at first but over time it exploded on the scene in Lowell like you would not believe. When the story was released over thirty years after it had been conceived. Because of its success and a movie now being made in Lowell about it spawned an interest in the city was happening like you would never believe. John Waters, who's movies and books had inspired the writing of the original idea and concept,was in Lowell as a consultant on the movie and had a good role that finally gave him the credibility as an actor that he had never gotten before in any other film. He was in Provincetown for the summer so spending time in Lowell was no big deal. In the early nineteen eighties the college was gonna show Pink Flamingos but canceled at the last minute. Now the city treated him like their second son. If you can believe it. The gay community in Lowell was in seventh heaven especially all the artists that had followed his movies and books and his life. Some people knew him from Provincetown and many people from the Cape came up to check out Lowell because of him being there.

Even though John's role in panty cult was significant he was also very involved with another unique production in Lowell called The 13th Zone in the role of Doctor Perverto and was spending time with that.

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It was still being cast and many actors from the West Coast were in Lowell hoping for roles because of what everyone was saying about Lowell and how it was the new hip place to be at and maybe even move too. Actors from New york City that had friends in the area were staying with them and getting to know the area. But the tru be told most of the best roles where going to go to local citizens living in or around the Lowell area. The role of Sergeant Smegman was the one that everyone wanted the most. Lady Gaga was nesting in Lowell because she had been offered a role especially created for her as The Queen of the 13th Zone what was still being written in at the last minute. Every Actor you could think of was looking to get the role that everyone knew was the role of a life time. It was the role of Sargent Smegman. Alex Baldwin was seen at

Espresso pizza because everyone had heard that it was the best in the area if you wanted real Italian pizza and that all the really interesting offbeat characters in Lowell and the area hung out there.
He understood that the role was going to require him to gain some weight if he was to get a chance at the role of  Sargent Smegman,or as his buddies would refer to him as 'The Sarge”. Alex had the inside scoop on the making of the 13th Zone after hearing about the movie Panty Cult that was being filmed in Lowell and had already gained almost one hundred pounds in the months before arriving in Lowell but was hoping to put on another twenty pounds before the shooting if he got the part.



Jeff Bridges was not only looking to get the role of The Sarge or any of the other plum parts that were out there,he was seriously thinking of buying some property and moving to Lowell.
He thought it was the best place with the most interesting people he had ever meet. He said that being in Lowell was like living in a movie and everyone’s the Dude. Everyone in Lowell treated him like a regular guy and he appreciated that. Everyone in the cast,crew and the whole production team were treated like family from all the people in Lowell. The city was overjoyed having Lowell in the news because of the two films that were being produced for the most part in Lowell.
It looked like Liev Schreiber had a good chance of getting the role. He didn't have the weight but he had everything else that made him perfect for the role. He pretty much kept to himself except sometimes he would go off to offbeat places in Lowell he heard about with a few of the local musicians but most of them were long gone.
Joaquin Phoenix was another actor that was thinking about the role of The Sarge but he had  done The Joker and he wasn't too keen on another over the top role so soon. As it turned out he would get the role of Piss and Liev would get the role of Moan. Piss and Moan were The Sarge's two main minions and the roles were greatly expanded once they were cast in the movie. Jeff got the role of Sidney Hipple one of the central characters and to some the best role.



But role of The Sarge wasn't cast right away

even as all the big names had tried out for the role. What was the problem? It seems that the director David Lynch who was looking for the right person for each role had been spending a lot of time at Western Avenue Studios where there were a shitload of artists who rented rooms for reasonable rents. It was like being in an art mall during open studios which were halted because of COVID-19 but tenants could have visitors if they wanted but it was closed to the public. David Lynch was spending time at the Lowell House Of Improvisation with Lance Gargoyle who rented a space there since 2006 who did theater,writing,art,music and films. It seems that both Lynch and Gargoyle had both owned and performed on the same Korg Keyboard Work Station, the O1wFD and found they had a lot in common.

Most artists that were there didn't mingle as much as in the early days but David had met a few that Lance had become tight with over the years. Lance has seen hundreds of tenants move out over the years. Some because they couldn't sell enough to pay the rent. Some because they moved or decided to work at their home instead and save money. Some because of management. The developer had a good idea and the rents was cheaper than anywhere else in the state but maybe he lost interest or it expanded and got so huge with over 300 units that he couldn't put as much consideration in as he had in the beginning.



He had an on sight manager at first that was an artist there but she lost interest after a while because maybe she got overwhelmed by the low level of interest the newer artists were showing and the limited involvement by upper management and all the complaining she had to process day in and day out.

It became unbearable for her and luckily she was relieved of her duties which were taken over by another tenant who had little interest in being an artist or and rarely if ever was curious enough,like the owner to visit and be interested in the tenants or their studios or what they were doing. It was said that after 2014 it had started to become the largest collection of artists that had little or no interest in others that were there like the old days and sadly weren't even curious as weren't the owner. They might walk by your studio and if you were lucky while they were

there would peek inside. This included the tenants. But it was still the best place to be of all the art places in Lowell when the movies where being made.

Anyways Lynch had gotten to know about 10 artists or people who had studios there besides Lance and got to know them well. One person that stuck him like being hit with a shovel was a Jeweler named Robert Williams. Bob was one of the only artists there since the early days that still left his studio and would visit a few other other artists when he met Lynch and they hit it off instantly.

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David could see the uniqueness and genuineness that he had and how comfortable with himself he was and how he got along with people so well. Lynch had Bob and his son who had been working with him and helping his father for years, create and manufacture jewelery that Bob designed and created for David. They became good friends and David felt comfortable with Bob and after a short time asked Bob something one day before the casting was completed. He said Bob I'm having a hell of a time casting the part of The Sarge. He's the only important role I've got left to fill and I was wonder if you could help me out. Bob said sure Dave I'll help you anyway I can. You're my buddy. I want you to play the role of Sargent Smegman. Oh shit said Bob “I'm not an actor and ain't even interested in performing why do you want me to do the role when everybody and his brother wants and deserves the role of a life time not me. David said that he had seen and worked with some of the most interesting and genuine people that were not only natural in the craft of acting but easy to work with because they had that spark that ignited the world and never even knew it but felt it all along. You my friend have that spark and I think you would be ideal for this role. Bob insisted and said that he had too much work to get done and how about all the projects he had to do for him that was helping give Bob and his son a big boost in revenue?

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His son spoke up and said he could handle it. Bob said he still wasn't sure he could pull off

playing the role. Lynch said he could and he was sure of it and wouldn't say it or make a fool of him if he didn't. Bob gave in and agreed to help out his new good buddy David who was in a jam and Bob was the only person who could save the day. Bob was on the set the next day got to know everyone and before you knew it he had all his lines down cold,knew  blocking and was as professional and as valuable as anyone else there.

He made many friends who were seen as big shots but were always down to Earth with Bob as he was with them. The days Bob wasn't needed for a scene he was still there checking out what was going on and learning what was needed. After the movie was completed Bob took it easy for a while. The work was all caught up by his son at the studio and he had many projects now from actors and crew members from around the country and sometimes the world who he had gotten to know and many he became friends with for the rest of his life and came back to Lowell to pick up their jewelry or whatever Bob had created for them and tell stories about what happened on the set of The 13th Zone.

Later on in life when people found out about him being in the movie and how much they enjoyed him in the role he wouldn't make a big deal about it even when they said he was their favorite role in the film and he must have been doing acting for a long time to do so well and be so impressive.



At the cast party after the filmed had wrapped everybody got thank you notes from David and the Producers and the Distributors of the film. Bob also got another one signed by all the cast and crew,over 100 signatures with thanks and how good it was meeting him and getting to work with him. It was good to see that someone who had given so much to the Lowell community and Western Avenue Studios had finally been recognized.

The confidence of the success of the movie was so overwhelming that merchandizing had already been started on a Sergeant Smegman doll and was being produced in Lowell as was all the other items being sold after the movie was released.

While in Lowell John Waters met Lance Gargoyle, the guy who was involved in the original stage production of Panty Cult before there was any thoughts of anyone liking or getting it never mind actually someone making a movie about it and finding it worthwhile.

It had been almost 40 years since the original idea was put on paper never mind that a basic outline wasn't written until 1998. But it now was in production as a movie and the play of Panty Cult had been over for a week.



John was interested in Lowell and what it was like in the old days that he might find interesting. Lance enjoyed Water's movies more than anything and was sad to see them not being made any longer because of financing that John couldn't get any longer.

Lance found his books even more entertaining than his movies and collected them as soon as they came out. He had first read Shock Value back in 1988 and was always happy to see a new book come out and find out what he was up to next. Lance was a straight dude but he found out more about the gay lifestyle reading his books than he ever could had imagined. I bet he knew more about the gay life than most of his gay friends. At least the ones that had never read John Water's books.

Lance told him about a guy that lived in Lowell when he first came to the city in 1977. His name was John Drussel. He was originally from Baltimore,had grown up there and spoke of his earlier days living there as a young man about The Block which he said was a gigantic combat zone and how he always slept in the graveyards because it was the best and safest place when he was drunk which I assumed was often. He said that if he passed out and slept in a good section of town he would get arrested and have to spend time in jail. If he got drunk and passed out in a bad part of town he might get his throat sliced.



So he always slept in a graveyard when he was homeless and drunk. We called him the panty man because he spoke about someone in Baltimore that he knew that bought soiled women panties from hookers from the Block. It turned out to be him. He lived in several rooming houses in Lowell and even had a hamper in one of them for the soiled panties he collected in Lowell while he was here.

He would tell you himself that he would go from Jekyll and Hyde when he got drunk. He moved from Lowell before the 1980's probably back to Baltimore. He was the start of the original idea about Panty Cult. I guess John Waters being in Lowell brought everything full circle.